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ABSTRACT

The concept of equal educational opportunity is examined as it applies to recent Asian immigrants who are university students. It is proposed that recent immigrants, especially refugees, are deprived of equal education due to life circumstances and inadequate academic preparation. As such, many of them cannot be expected to compete with other U.S. students for academic success. On the other hand, it is argued, as with other minorities, education is perceived as a primary means for upward mobility. It is concluded that the educators have an obligation to help this group of minority students as they would help any other minority group. Descriptive data illustrating the comparative disadvantage of recent Asian immigrant students are presented, and possible ways for university English-as-a-Second-Language programs to provide needed language preparation for this group are discussed. (MSE)

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Equal Opportunity and ESL for LEP Domestic Students

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Introduction

The concept of equal educational opportunity for all stems from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Since then, minorities have continued their struggle to break barriers in all spheres of life. In higher education, especially in public colleges and universities, a great deal of progress has been made although true equality is yet to be realized. Thanks to the earlier efforts, when recent Asian immigrants reach college going age, they are able to join other minorities to enjoy the minority status in gaining entry to the higher learning institutions.

This paper intends to examine the concept of equal educational opportunity as it applies to recent Asian immigrant students in the universities. We will argue that recent Asian Americans, especially the refugee students, are deprived of equal opportunities to education due first to life circumstances, and secondly to inadequate academic preparation in schools. As such, many of them cannot be expected to compete on equal basis for academic success with other American students. On the other hand, as with other minority students, education is perceived as one of the primary means for them to become upward mobile. As educators, we have the obligation to help this group of minority students, just as we do with other minority groups. We will begin the paper by presenting some descriptive data to illustrate the comparative disadvantage recent Asian immigrant students have. We will then focus on the university level ESL Program to demonstrate what universities can provide in terms of language preparation in order to help these disadvantaged domestic students.

LEP Asian American Students: a comparative study

The student population we are concerned with are the recent Asian American students with limited English proficiency at CU Boulder. During the admission process, all foreign born Asian American students with unsatisfactory English scores are referred to an admission sub-committee for further assessment. Students with a Michigan Proficiency score of below 80, and whose essay test score indicates a below college level English proficiency are usually referred to the ESL Program for further English preparation while being admitted as provisional freshmen. Each year, about 20 such students are admitted into the university. Most of these students come from Southeast Asian countries of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, or from East Asian countries of Korea and Taiwan.

Before going into the causal factors of these students' academic under-preparation, below are some comparative data for the ESL population and the university student population at large. According to our study of CU Boulder students' predictied success rate, ESL students have the lowest predicted GPA upon

entering the university, but their persistence rate is comparable to the other minority populations.

(Table 1: Academic Preparation of All Student Populations)
(Table 2: Persistence Rate of All Student Populations)

Predicted GPA, or PGPA, is a commonly used predictor of success calculated on the basis of a student's high school academic record and his/her college entrance examination scores. It is used to predict the success of entering freshman students. Interpreted in another way, it indicates the level of academic preparation of the student. Table 1 shows that of all the ethnic populations, White students have the highest predicted success rate and over all better academic preparation. Black students have the lowest predicted success rate and are the least well prepared minority group. However, when the Asian students are sorted into Non-Fall Institute Asian American (regularly admitted), FI Asian American and FI-ESL Asian American (provisionaly admitted) populations, the NON-FI Asian American students are comparable to and may be even better in their predicted success rate than the White student population. On the other hand, the ESL students, also Asian American in ethnic identity, have even lower predicted success rate than the Black student population.

Table 2.A. shows the persistence rate of students entering CU Boulder in the Fall of 1980 and 1981. As more recent data are not readily available, this information will be used as the baseline for comparison purpose. Table 2.B. shows the persistence rate of three Asian American populations entering the same university in the Fall of 1983, 1984 and 1985. The ESL Asian American students, though having the over all lowest PGPA, have a persistence rate comparable to those of other minority groups in Table 2.A. The ESL students' enrollment rate in the second year is higher than their Non-FI counterpart in 1983 and 1985, and is higher than that of the White students in 1980-1981. The ESL students' enrollment rate is lower than their NON-FI counterpart by 20% in their third and fourth years, but comparable to the enrollment rate of all other minority population, and perhaps even slightly higher than some of the groups. These findings are significant in two ways. Firstly, ESL students are the most disadvantaged group as they are comparatively the least academically prepared prior to entering the university. We could expect them to also have the lowest persistence rate. However, even though least prepared, ESL students' retention and persistence rate is comparable to all other minority groups.

ESL Student Population

A lot of attention has been given to Asian American students, in particular to their academic success, thereby the myth of "the Model Minority". The survey in the previous section

shows that among the Asian Americans, there is a group of disadvantaged recent immigrants that has been overshadowed by the myth, and they deserve our special attention. We now turn to this student population.

English Proficiency

As mentioned earlier, the ESL student population includes two groups of students, the recent immigrants from East Asia, and refugees from Southeast Asia. Both groups show deficiency in their command of the English language. This is reflected in their ACT and Michigan Proficiency Test scores. The two tables below show these two sets of scores. Because the existing database does not contain information concerning a student's immigration status, the two groups of students are not separated in the tables.

(Table 3: Michigan Test Scores)
(Table 4: ACT Test Scores)

According to the Michigan Test Manual, students with proficiency scores above 70 are recommended for university admission but are advised to take 10 hrs per week ESL intensive course. Scores 69 and below are "not proficient enough in English to take any academic work". (p.12) Since our ESL students are not "foreign students" as they all have some years of education experience in the US public school system, this recommended score is not strictly adhered to for placement purpose. As shown in Table 3, the average Michigan Proficiency score since 1983 has been around 65. Writing scores are graded subjectively. A guideline devised by the Spring International school 1979 has been used to assign scores to student essays. Scores between 57 and 64, the general range of scores our students fall into, are described as having "average command of English".

ACT English scores are also used as a proficiency indicator. As mentioned before, students with an ACT English score of 16 or below are referred to a sub-committee for reevaluation for admission. Therefore, none of our students have an ACT score above 16. The average is around 9 or 10. For comparative purpose, students' Math, Social Science, and Natural Science scores are also listed in Table 4. There seems to be a good correlation between language proficiency and academic performance. In general, our students have lowest scores in Social Science, followed by Natural Science and Math. Students claim that the first mainstream content subject they became comfortable with in school was math.

Academic Under-preparation

Besides the fact that English is their second language, that all ESL students and their families had to go through social cultural adjustments when they arrived here, there are two other

factors that we believe have contributed to ESL students academic under-preparation prior to entering the university--disturbed formal education and delayed academic acquisition.

College age refugee students today are most likely the victim of both factors. Due to war-time conditions in their home countries, refugee students may not have had the chance to receive a complete primary school education which provides basic L1 literacy. If these students are 18 or 19 today, they would have been 5 or 6 when Saigon fell and war spread to other Southeast Asian countries. They most likely spent their formative years fleeing from their homeland to foreign places, or being sent from one resettlement camp to another before finally settling in the US. Collier in her study on "Age and Rate of Acquisition of Second Language for Academic Purposes" suggests that students with L1 literacy and Math experience in their native language before entering schools in the US require shorter time to reach grade-level norms in academic achievement. (Collier 1987) If we accept the result of her study, we may begin to understand why refugee students, after being in this country for many years, still lag behind their American schoolmates. Disrupted formal education may be one of the major causes of delayed academic achievement. Below is a chart showing disrupted formal education of 9 refugee students currently enrolled in our ESL Program.

(Table 5: Disrupted Formal Education)

A second factor that may have attributed to students' academic under-preparation is deferred acquisition of academic subjects. This factor is applicable to both refugee and recent immigrant students. Typically, upon arrival, the students in our study had limited or no knowledge of English. Even those with several years of English lessons in schools in their own countries had in general below communication level English competency. As a result, they had to be placed in the ESL classes before being mainstreamed. Collier suggests that during the L2 language learning years, academic acquisition of mainstream curricula is delayed. (Collier 1987) As a result, these students spent time on language preparation while mainstream students concentrated on content area acquisition. ESL students, when eventually mainstreamed, follow the same syllabi as other American students. No intensive courses in the content area are given to the ESL students in order to make up the time and content subjects they miss. Consequently, ESL students are not equally prepared academically. Table 6 indicates the transitional period each of our ESL students went through in primary, junior and high school before being mainstreamed.

(Table 6: Deferred Acquisition of Academic Subjects)

Asian Americans and their success stories have created the

myth of the Model Minority. Asian parents and children alike are assumed to have high respect for education, and aspire to excel. Adjusting to a new social cultural environment for recent immigrants and refugees, however, must be confusing and difficult. A freshman's entrance examination essay reflects vividly his despair in trying to make adjustments in an unfamiliar educational system:

"I didn't know anything about college in high school until my senior year. But it was kind of too late to do anything to improve my grades. I had never thought of going to college until my senior year. No one had taught me about college when I was young."
(20 year old Vietnamese Chinese student. Born 1968; fled Vietnam in 1978. Arrived in the US in 1981.)

Other responses from students regarding their high school years include:

"ESL teachers were very nice to us. We were like their pets. But we didn't learn anything [in high school ESL classes]."

"We were told to take whatever courses we wanted. [This resulted in insufficient academic preparation for college admission.]

"I was told to take only ESL, language arts and PE for two semesters. I wasted a whole year not able to take science courses. I stayed in high school for an extra semester [after three years] because I wanted to learn more."

As we have limited first hand knowledge of school level ESL programs, we reserve our comments on them. But recent studies on CALLA (the cognitive academic langauge learning approach) demonstrate the need to look seriously at the ESL program for students who are being prepared to participate in mainstream content-area instruction. (Chamot and O'Malley 1987) ESL students can be better prepared academically if more serious consideration is given to their cognitive academic language and subject learning at school level.

Equal Educational Opportunities: how can the university ESL program serve its disadvantaged Asian American population.

When recent immigrant and refugee students come of age, they become potential candidates for universities. As education is a culturally preferred way to achieve social economic mobility, it is likely that many recent Asian Americans will seek university education before employment. What university level ESL programs can do to help these disadvantaged, under-prepared, minority students is the concern of the remainder of this paper.

At CU Boulder, since 1976, about 20 of these recent Asian American immigrants have been admitted under the Opportunity Program each year. They are placed in the ESL Program for langauge development for two semesters while taking other university level courses, either through the University Learning Center or from the regular schedule of classwork. The ESL Program is housed within the University Learning Center at CU Boulder. Below is a brief description of the ESL Program CU ULC offers to these disadvantaged Asian American students.

ESL for Academic Purposes

The goal of our university level ESL Program is to help students develop academic English competency. The program is academic English oriented because we believe our responsibility is to facilitate students' full participation and better performance in the academic community. Ideally, an ESP curriculum will be most relevant to individual student's needs. However, due to the small size of the student population, and the diverse interests of the students, the curriculum has to be designed in a manner that satisfies the needs of a wider range of students.

The ESL curriculum focuses on two language areas:
a. the development and production of written English for academic purposes;
b. the development and production of spoken English for academic purposes.
The reason for stressing the development and production of English for academic purposes is to help LEP students, in a limited time, develop their language competency in acquisition, processing, and delivering of information within an academically acceptable schema, or following the convention which satisfies the purpose and expectation of the academic audience. (See Reid 1987; Horowitz 1986) The reason to emphasize the written and the spoken English is because these are the language forms students will be using in order to communicate their processed information to other students and faculty in the university.
Psychologically, English for academic purposes allows ESL students to see the link between learning, developing and applying their language to the immediate environment. ESL courses will thus be viewed as a service for their academic needs rather than just another ESL course that holds students back from academic pursuit.

Upon students' request, we have also incorporated the study of English grammar, or the formal rules that guide students in monitoring their English. In our ESL program, the grammar component is incorporated in the spoken English courses rather than the writing courses for two reasons:
a. In a spoken-language oriented class, syntactic and semantic rules can be applied and reinforced more readily by way of face

to face interaction. Since all our students are effective communicators in daily conversation, emphasis is thus shifted from developing fluency, as in most spoken English classes to developing monitoring skills, processing, evaluating and organizing information, and relaying information in a manner acceptable to the university audience.

b. The writing component emphasizes the processing of information and the presentation of processed information in a form and in a discourse acceptable to academic readers. By removing the learning of formal rules and the conscious monitoring of errors, the writers can focus on the process of writing.

The approach we chose for our ESL Program is an integrated one, combining the process-centered approach with a product-centered approach. (See Connor 1987) We recognize that the development of a critical thinking process is essential for university level learning. By incorporating the process-centered approach in the ESL Program, we help students realize how information can be manipulated through reorganization, re-evaluation and integration with existing information (as against root learning). We also believe that in an ESL program, the product-centered approach should receive equal attention because ESL students are still in the process of developing their English proficiency. Therefore, we need to focus our attention on the development of language, helping students put information into an organized format, which meets the convention of the learned community. As Purves describes it, our task is to "acculturate" students into the academic community. As Swales puts it, ESL students' language development is a "soft process" which does not emphasize the cognitive relation between the writer or speaker and his/her internal world, but more the relation between the student, the academic environment and the intended audience. (Horowitz 1986; Swales 1987)

The ESL Program we offer contains two semesters of five courses:

Semester 1

ESL 180 focuses on the development of spoken English;
ESL 182 focuses on the development of written English;
ASK 095 focuses on reading and research strategies for academic purpose.

During the first semester, the two ESL courses are product centered. Using Enkvist's taxonomy, a sentence-based approach which emphasizes cohesion, and a predication-based approach which emphasizes text types are both employed. (See Connor 1987:679) The goal is to help students to develop their ability to manipulate the English langauge. The ASK course, on the other hand, helps students to use the language to learn study strategies which they can apply in information gathering and evaluation, skills they can apply to other university courses as

well as in their second semester ESL courses.

Semester 2

ESL 181 focuses on the process and production of information in spoken English for academic purpose;
ESL 183 focuses on the process and production of information in written English for academic purpose.

The main approach is process-centered. The goal is to help students actively participate in the critical thinking process, with the spoken and written products being the expression of the thought process. We also emphasize the product as one to be presented to the academic audience for evaluation and appreciation.

The ESL Program, thus, serves as a training ground, not only for better command of the English language, but also to acculturate students into the academic community. The skills to manipulate information and to deliver it in an acceptable convention, either in spoken form or written form, are highly valued in the university.

Conclusion

To conclude, we have identified a sub-minority group of Asian Americans who have been overlooked due to the model minority myth surrounding the Asian Americans. We have shown, using data from the institution we are most familiar with, , CU Boulder, that this group of recent immigrant and refugee students are under-prepared academically. As a result, they cannot be expected to compete on equal basis with other American students. However, even though their academic preparation as indicated by the PGPA is the least satisfactory among all student populations, their persistence rate, as indicated by their enrollment in the subsequent years in the university, shows that they are comparable to other minority groups on campus. We believe that we as educators are obliged to provide them with the same kinds of assistance we provide to other minority groups on the basis of equal rights and equal opportunities. In this paper, we proposed that university level ESL program for Asian American LEP students should be academic oriented. Almost all of the ESL students in our study had achieved communicative level of English competence before entering the university. The role of university level ESL program should be one that helps these students develop the competence to manipulate information and to communicate the product of the thinking process in a convention acceptable to the academic audience. Due to the short history of the current ESL curriculum, we are unable to provide empirical data to show the effect of such a curriculum and the effectiveness of the integrated approach we adopt. But we believe the direction we are heading is a promising one.

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Table 1: Academic Preparation of CU Boulder Students

	new freshmen entering Fall of				
	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
All students					
number	3329	3345	3610	3527	3733
PGPA 2.25+	91%	90%	90%	93%	93%
PGPA 2.75+	50%	49%	50%	53%	56%
Asian students					
number	122	157	148	180	231
PGPA 2.25+	73%	83%	77%	82%	82%
PGPA 2.75+	38%	52%	43%	46%	45%
White students					
number	2890	2872	3069	2976	3114
PGPA 2.25+	94%	92%	93%	95%	97%
PGPA 2.75+	53%	50%	52%	54%	60%
Black students					
number	69	57	63	69	89
PGPA 2.25+	50%	57%	58%	63%	52%
PGPA 2.75+	12%	22%	20%	15%	15%
Hispanic students					
number	134	133	167	155	195
PGPA 2.25+	74%	80%	72%	73%	71%
PGPA 2.75+	28%	37%	41%	40%	34%
Native American					
number	15	15	11	8	14
PGPA 2.25+	62%	75%	33%	86%	54%
PGPA 2.75+	23%	33%	33%	57%	38%
Non-FI Asian Am.					
number	87	113	100	132	188
PGPA 2.25+	90%	93%	90%	95%	93%
PGPA 2.75+	55%	70%	62%	64%	56%
FI non-ESL A.Am.					
number	18	25	23	31	27
PGPA 2.25+	33%	68%	39%	48%	30%
PGPA 2.75+	0%	24%	13%	6%	0%
FI ESL Asian Am.					
number	17	19	25	17	16
PGPA 2.25+	35%	58%	64%	47%	56%
PGPA 2.75+	0%	16%	8%	12%	19%

(Descriptive data provided by the Office of Research and Testing, CU Boulder, Feb. 1988)

Table 2: Persistence Rate of CU Boulder Students

A. Proportions of CU Boulder Fall 1980 and 1981 Freshmen Enrolling Years 2,3, and 4

	Black	N. Am.	Hispanic	Asian	White
number	112	36	183	149	5773
Here 2nd Fall	60%	66%	69%	87%	82%
Here 3rd Fall	44%	58%	54%	77%	69%
Here 4th Fall	34%	44%	46%	70%	63%
Grad 4y or less	7%	8%	16%	26%	27%

(Descriptive data derived from 'Minority Graduation and Perisitence', p.3; p.7. CU Boulder Office of Research and Testing, Nov. 18, 1987.)

B. Proportions of CU Boulder Fall 1983 to 1985 Freshmen Enrolling Years 2, 3, and 4

	new freshman entering fall of 1983	1984	1985
Non-FI A.Am.			
number	87	113	110
Here 2nd Fall	83%	88%	84%
Here 3rd Fall	76%	76%	
Here 4th Fall	71%		
Grad 4y or less	24%	1%	
FI A. Am.			
number	18	25	23
Here 2nd Fall	72%	84%	74%
Here 3rd Fall	44%	56%	
Here 4th Fall	39%		
Grad 4y or less	6%		
FI-ESL A. Am.			
number	17	19	25
Here 2nd Fall	88%	84%	92%
Here 3rd Fall	53%	58%	
Here 4th Fall	47%		
Grad 4y or less	0%		

(Data provided by CU Boulder Office of Research and Testing, March 1988)

Table 3: Michigan Test Scores

	new freshmen entering Fall of 1983	1984	1986	1987
Proficiency Test				
number	16	22	32	22
average	60.2%	65.1%	66.2%	67.5%
range	(45-79%)	(29-87%)	(51-88%)	(46-86%)
Writing				
number			32	18
average			59.4%	58.5%
range			(48-68%)	(50-74%)

Table 4: ACT Test Scores

		new freshmen entering Fall of 1983	1984	1986	1987
number		12	19	25	18
ACT English	average	9.4	9.5	10.3	9.6
	range	(3-14)	(3-16)	(3-16)	(5-16)
ACT Soc. Sc.	average	7.5	9.3	8.5	8.4
	range	(1-17)	(3-17)	(4-12)	(4-13)
ACT Nat. Sc.	average	14.3	15.9	13.5	14
	range	(7-20)	(5-22)	(7-18)	(6-24)
ACT Math.	average	17.8	20.2	16.7	17.8
	range	(7-24)	(10-26)	(2-27)	(6-29)

Table 5: Disrupted Formal Education
Table 6: Deferred Acquisition of Academic Subjects